

ON FREE
WILL



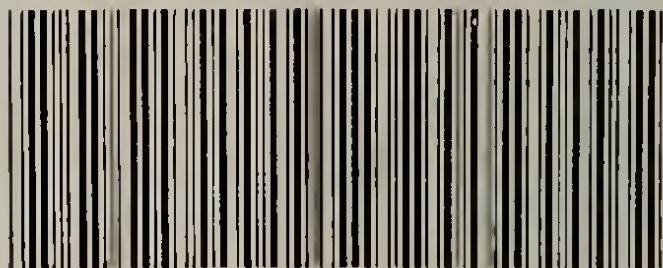
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ON FREE WILL.

If, in the history of our human race, there is one question on which more brain toil, more genius, and more terrible agony of body, mind, and soul, has been expended than on any other, it is probably on this question of the freedom of man's will. Is he, on the one hand, merely the creature of circumstances ? — a being doomed to an iron fatalism from which there is, and can be, no possible escape? — or is he, on the contrary, a being endowed

Metaphysics, Philosophy, or Theology — and I think that both history, and experience will show us that nine-tenths of the misunderstandings, misconceptions, and false and heretical thought so prevalent in these sciences is due, simply and entirely, to a loose, and inaccurate phraseology. One thinker expresses an idea by one word, another thinker the same idea by another word; result, mutual misunderstanding: or again, a writer will use a word in one sense, and shortly after uses it in a

perfect, and final knowledge.

Thus if you give a mathematician the factors of a sum, he will work it out, and will know “a priori” the result: or to alter the illustration, describe to a mechanician a given arrangement of cog wheels, ratchets, and pinions, and he knows “a priori” the resultant machine, and what it can accomplish. So too, describe to an astronomer a certain planet or comet, and the laws that govern its motion, and he will trace out for you its future path, and where it

will be at a certain time. These then are all illustrations of “a priori” knowledge, a mental operation working from the “data” to its result—from the “why” to the “how”—giving us, I repeat, the knowledge of a thing as it is “in itself,” and therefore perfect, absolute, and final.

Furthermore, I would like to point out, this knowing a thing “a priori” implies an “imaging” it forth in the mind, an “ideal creation,” corresponding to the “Divine Ideals” of Plato, and the Schoolmen, those

archetypes of Creation. In other words this “a priori” knowledge is, primarily and principally, the “knowledge” that the Godhead has, imaging forth” His Creation. Yet inasmuch as man is in the image of God, he has a portion of this power, and can to some small extent “know” things “a priori” (as in the instances given); or, in other words, can he a Creator, both ideally in his brain, and actually in the external world.

This then is “a priori” knowledge; knowledge, I repeat, perfect, absolute,

final, and implying an “ideal creation.”

But the second mental process, to which we also apply the term “knowledge,” is of a totally different type. It is, in fact, the reverse operation to the former, is “a posteriori,” or inductive, as that is “a priori,” or deductive: it is, in short, a blind groping from the “how,” to the “why”—from the manifestation, to the reality as it is “in itself,”—or, in philosophical language, from the “phenomenon” to the “noumenon.”

The vast majority of our

How corresponding to these two diverse, and opposite types of “knowledge”—“a priori,” and “a posteriori”—there are, it seems to me, also two classes of “proofs,” or manifestations of our knowledge, again “a priori,” and “a posteriori.”

Thus, to return to my previous illustration, the mechanician “images” forth his machine, and “knows” it “a priori,” and so is able to “prove” it to you, also “a priori,” by “imaging” forth to you the various sequences in the chain of its creation. This is an

treating it as real.

This class of “proofs” then are, as you will notice, empirical, sensational, and “common sense,” and are only probable in a greater or less degree. They can never, in short, reach absolute and necessary certainty, as the former—or “a priori”—class of proofs do.

Having made this vital distinction between the two types of “knowledge”—“a priori,” and “a posteriori,”—and the resultant two types of “proofs”—again “a priori,” and “a posteriori,”—I will

certainty of our own individual existence. To endeavour then to “prove” free will by “a priori” arguments, or corollaries, deduced from external phenomena, would involve us in the absurdity of trying to prove a more certain, by a less certain—a prime fact of consciousness, by the minor facts, or deductions of experience or reason.

The only class then of arguments that are at all available in this case are the “a posteriori” ones of congruous effects. In other words, having first shown “free will” to be a primary

fact of consciousness, and therefore not to be denied, we can then go on to make assurance doubly sure by pointing to common every day experience, and the other facts of the case, and showing that the practical workings of our nature are in accordance with this necessary theory of free will.

Having made these preliminary and needful remarks let us now proceed to discuss the various philosophical arguments in the case.

To begin then we may say that the arguments for

then they must have been fore-ordained, or pre-destined by some Almighty power; and Who should that Power be but our Creator Himself?

This then is the argument from the Omniscience of God, and is, it will be noticed, the reasoning underlying not only the Calvinistic fatalism, but also that of Mohammedanism, and of other Eastern systems older still; taking its origin from a Theism that, among all the Infinite Attributes of the Godhead, feels only, and dwells only on His

Wisdom, and above all on His Power; a Theism, in fact, closely akin to the monergism of Pantheism.

A very good presentation of this phase of thought is given us in the Rubaiyet of Omar Khayyam (lxxiii), where it is said:

*“With earth’s first clay
they did the last man
knead*

*“and there of the last
harvest sowed the seed
“and the first morning of
creation wrote*

*“what the last dawn of
reckoning shall read”*

delusion," is, in reality, cutting away the ground on which every argument, and every perception of truth must be based.

But more than this: in thus refusing to credit his own perceptions of free will, he is not merely denying necessary truth in general, but is, in particular, suicidically destroying the very platform on which his whole argument rests.

If we go down to the root of the matter we will find, I think, that our conceptions of necessary cause and effect take, in the first

place, their origin from our natural intuitions as to our own power of prime origination. I form a certain volition, perform a certain act, and from this act I perceive certain results to follow: from this sequence I deduce by analogy a law of cause and effect in general, and apply it to the world around me; and, if I am a scientist, I call this analogy "the law of sequence, and universal causation." I furthermore, if I am a thoughtful man, perceive that while I can originate motion, no such power is observable in the material

world around me; it can merely transmit, or hand on, motion, and that by reason of its inertia, or deadness, which will not suffer it to either add, or take away, one iota from the sum total committed to it: this fact I then denominate "the law of the conservation of force." But since the material world cannot originate force, and since both my experience, and my intuitions teach me that force, equally with matter, cannot originate itself, I am therefore led to predicate a Great Primal Cause— a God of all— Who

intelligible, be based on the primary law of "cause and effect;" or in other words, on the inability, on the one hand, of an effect to be without an adequate cause (as would be the case if the sum total of force were increased); or in the other, of a cause to be without an adequate effect (as would be the case if the sum total of force were diminished). But if we treat our instinctive feeling of free will and origination as a baseless phantasy, on what possible grounds can we predicate such a thing as "cause and effect" at all?

“Arguing in a circle” has always been held to be an utterly inconsequent and delusive act; but the “Necessitarian school” even disprove themselves “in a circle,” their argument ending, as I have shown, by denying the very intuitions and axioms upon which it is based!!

This is such a self-evident, and flagrant absurdity that we need hardly call attention to the lesser, yet still vital one, of attempting to confute “a priori” a prime fact of consciousness (namely free will), by the secondary and derived facts

This will explain the well known fact that a man can see (to take one class of sensations) only what his mind allows him to see; and that, with the same identical sense perceptions, a farmer, and a hunter, will view a very different landscape.

“Thought” then consists of, first apprehension, secondly synthesis, and thirdly analysis: it follows then that the “power of choice,” to enable this analysis to be made, is an absolute necessity for thought; an automaton, or even a person temporarily

general, just as it is subject to one of these laws in particular, that namely of "gravitation." In short we may rightly conclude that in so far as a man is *spiritually* considered, he is free; but in so far as he is *material*, he is predestined; or in other words that while "universal causation" does not *govern*, yet it *circumscribes* him.

This formula of "Circumscribed, not governed" will, I think, elucidate, and show us the proper bearing of the puzzling question of "Atavism," or in other

on the one hand, or to virtues and talents on the other— recur in the same family again and again. How often we see a child reproduce with startling, and well-nigh photographic accuracy the personality of a grandfather, or great grandfather; who has not repeatedly observed this phenomenon, and observing been struck by it? But on the other hand we have also the well-known fact that no one can predict the future of a child: there will be three brothers, sons of the same parents, with the same

may say that this “power of choice,” or “free will,” is an essential power of the spiritual Ego; which yet, inasmuch as it works through a material body, is circumscribed (not governed) by the material laws of necessary sequence affecting that body: and furthermore; seeing that our Spirit can comprehend and govern “matter”—be in short, its “god,”—we can, by the due use of our opportunities, so bend and sway Material Nature to our will, both in our bodies and in the external world, as to render practically

inappreciable the
circumscribing wall of
material laws.

Finally let us consider the
first argument for
Necessitarianism that I
noticed, the one namely
that our Creator, being
Omniscient, and Almighty,
foreknows what our future
actions will be which
therefore must be
inevitable, and predestined
by Him.

Yet is not this an idea
founded on a
misconception arising from
words? We give a name,
and forthwith proceed to
argue from that name!

inherited disposition,— yet Omniscience neither knows, nor fore-ordains, his future development and character; on which, and on which alone, his future judgment will depend. This distinction does justice both to our inherent beliefs in God's government of His world, and to our intuitions of a judgment hereafter, and of right and wrong deeds here; words entirely without meaning were there no such thing as a “free will” in man.

But besides the fact that this argument from Omniscience springs from

an analysis of our own definitions, it is also true, as I have shown above in relation to the argument from “the law of universal causation,” that such an argument is itself based **On** the very intuitions it seeks to overthrow. If *my* creations are only fancied deeds, and self-delusions, how can I possibly prove, or even imagine, such a thing as “a Creation” at all; my intuitions being false, all conceptions based on those intuitions must themselves be false. True, there might be, in such a case, a Creator and Ruler,

and His Creation; but what possible conception could I form, either of Him, or of a Cosmos that had no possible relation, or semblance to my fancied world of self hallucination? In fact such fatalistic conceptions agree far better with an extreme, mechanical Pantheism, and are not at all congruous to the idea of a Personal God. A loving, all-wise Father, giving to His children personality, and a free will, to enable them to build up their characters, and work out their salvation; that is one conception. A Universe

of unvarying laws—
“Karma,” or “Fates,”— with
beings who have for a few
brief moments the delusion
of personality, and then
dissolve in death, like
bubbles that float and burst
in an illimitable ocean of
being; that is another
conception, having nothing
in common with the
previous one, but rather
being utterly incompatible,
and lying at the opposite
pole of thought.

To sum up then we may
say that man must perforce
be allowed to have a free
will, circumscribed, it is
true, but not governed, by

